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INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Report on the Workshop on Higher Education and Indigenous Peoples
(Costa Rica, 28 June to 2 July 1999)

Chairperson/Rapporteur: Mr. José Carlos MORALES

Introduction

1. In its resolution 50/157 approving the programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, the General Assembly identified as a major objective of the Decade the education of indigenous and non-indigenous societies concerning the situation, cultures, languages, rights and inspirations of indigenous people. In its resolution 1997/32, the Commission on Human Rights requested the High Commissioner for Human Rights to consider organizing a workshop for research and higher education institutions focusing on indigenous issues in education, to improve exchange of information between such institutions and to encourage future cooperation, in consultation with indigenous people and in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other relevant United Nations bodies. At its sixteenth session in July 1998, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations considered the issues of indigenous education and language as its main topics. In its resolution 1999/51, the Commission on Human Rights welcomed the invitation from the Government of Costa Rica to host a workshop for research and higher education institutions focusing on indigenous issues in education.

2. Under the terms of that resolution, the Office of the High Commissioner invited Governments, United Nations organizations and specialized agencies, indigenous peoples and research and higher education organizations and institutions to appoint experts to take part in the workshop.

3. The Workshop on Education and Indigenous Peoples was held at the "La Catalina" Convention Centre in San José, from 28 June to 2 July 1999. More than 70 experts attended the workshop. The list of participants is annexed to this report.

I. Organization of work

A. Programme

4. The workshop approved the following programme:

1. Election of officers.

2. Theme I: Indigenous peoples and higher education: needs, access, problems and solutions - a general exchange of views.

3. Theme II: The role of higher education in the training and development of skills in indigenous peoples - practical experiences.

4. Theme III: The role of research, higher education and training institutions in promoting the human rights of indigenous peoples.

5. Theme IV: International cooperation in research and higher education establishments - creating networks and exchanges and developing joint programmes.

6. Discussion of conclusions and recommendations.

7. Closure of the workshop.

B. Opening of the workshop

5. The workshop was opened by Mr. José Carlos Morales on behalf of the indigenous peoples of Costa Rica. Mr. Morales welcomed participants. He also said that the workshop's results and deliberations would be very beneficial to and would revolutionize higher education systems for indigenous peoples throughout the world. He stressed the importance of holding the workshop as a means of fulfilling one of the objectives of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Lastly, he thanked the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion of Costa Rica for supporting the holding of the workshop. He also thanked the Instituto de Enseñanza Radiofónica (ICR) for its technical support and the Netherlands Humanistic Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (HIVOS) for facilitating the participation of indigenous delegates from Costa Rica.

6. On behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Julián Burger thanked the indigenous peoples of Costa Rica for their greetings and thanked the Government of Costa Rica for hosting the workshop. He retraced some of the historical background for workshop participants, explaining that improvements in education were one of the targets of the International Decade. He introduced four main themes for the workshop and urged participants to take advantage of the opportunity to share their experiences with the meeting. He reminded those present that the workshop would be submitting a report to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in July, which should contain practical and feasible recommendations.

7. On behalf of the Government of Costa Rica, Mrs. Elizabeth Odio Benito, President in Office, welcomed participants to San José. She said that Costa Rica had been particularly pleased to host the workshop with the cooperation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. She said that the indigenous peoples on her continent had been marginalized and had suffered from the lack of any kind of opportunity; they had been destroyed and ignored. Even in the recent armed conflicts in Central America, indigenous peoples had been systematically persecuted and their annihilation had been sought as a policy objective. When the United Nations General Assembly had adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, all peoples on earth had welcomed the Declaration as the paradigm of what should be respect for equal dignity and rights for all people. That Universal Declaration still lay at the heart of the philosophy and ethics which inspired democracies throughout the world. But it was no good overlooking the fact that the paradigm represented by the Universal Declaration left out and went on leaving out women and children, black men and women, and indigenous men and women. Referring to the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, she pointed out that women and children and black men and women had come a long way. They already had declarations establishing principles aimed at eliminating discrimination against them, followed by Conventions by which Governments are politically and legally bound to adopt administrative, legal and educational measures to eliminate such discrimination. In the case of indigenous peoples, however, the struggle is still on to achieve a draft declaration. Extending coverage of the Universal Declaration paradigm to all human beings in terms of equality, dignity and rights has been a slow process. She said that the workshop should be a milestone along that slow but unrelenting struggle, which many groups have been waging within the United Nations to achieve the necessary changes in mentalities and souls in order to raise indigenous peoples to the position they should hold in truly democratic societies. In all the years she had spent at the University of Costa Rica, in its Law Faculty and in all the different disciplines where she had given courses, she had never taught in any indigenous establishment and had never had any indigenous colleague of either gender. She confirmed finally that the recommendations would be extremely important for the Government of Costa Rica and for all the Governments that made up the United Nations.

II. Theme I - Indigenous peoples and higher education: needs, access, problems and solutions - a general exchange of views

8. The theme was introduced by Mrs. Myrna Cunningham, Dean of the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast

(URACCAN). This university has about 3,980 students from among the Miskito, Creole, Mestizo, Mayangana, Rama and Garifuna peoples. As a chiefly indigenous university, the URACCAN constitutes a pioneering experiment in terms of the new challenges of indigenous higher education in relation to the conservatism of the dominant university system.

9. After referring to the general background of financial stringency in Latin America, where higher education budgets had been drastically cut by between 30 and 60 per cent, depending on the countries, the speaker showed that this general background of economic crisis aggravated still further the obstacles that indigenous peoples had to overcome in order, on the basis of ethical, intellectual and technical ability, to develop their intellectual training establishments and strategies, while ensuring respect for the ethnic, cultural, gender and generational diversity of indigenous peoples, and facilitating the implementation of new educational paradigms combining ancestral knowledge with modern technical tools. The university's mission in that respect was to help strengthen the identity, independence and sustainable development of those peoples, through the training and professionalization of human resources. Referring to World Bank reports recognizing that eradicating poverty among indigenous peoples depended increasingly on effective access to education, training and higher education, she added that the development of compatibility and intercultural ties between indigenous and non-indigenous people were essential to the establishment of egalitarian intercultural relations, in conformity with the recommendations of the report "Learning: the Treasure Within" (the "Delors report") produced by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

10. To achieve its objective, URACCAN maintains close cooperation with several other establishments on the American continent, in Canada, the United States, Guatemala and Chile, and in Europe in Finland, the United Kingdom, Germany and Greenland. It aims to undertake research and developing programmes in order to heighten the self-esteem of indigenous communities and promote the acquisition of knowledge in the fields of sociology, linguistics, educational sciences, health, environmental management, traditional medicine and the fight against illiteracy, on the basis of participative and decentralized methodologies. State support, although insufficient, does facilitate access through study fellowships for indigenous people. Teacher training constitutes a special challenge, since the type of training provided for teachers by the dominant systems, which are opposed to the development of an indigenous university and try to prevent its creation, can exert a negative influence, opposed to the educational and cultural philosophy of any indigenous university.

11. That first presentation was followed by the speeches of Professor Siddharaj Solanki and Professor Georges Sioui. Professor Sioui, of the Canadian Institute of Indigenous Government, retraced the historical adventure of indigenous knowledge from its tragic contact with colonial thought up to the present situation on the eve of the third millennium. Starting from the philosophical dimension of Amerindian thought, he said that indigenous knowledge, rooted in the depths of the sacred circle of life, tends to be circular, as opposed to western thought, which is linear. Professor Sioui advocated that the teaching content of indigenous higher

education should reflect that circular vision in an effort to reconcile the two outlooks on life and as a means of humanizing globalization thanks to indigenous humanism.

12. Professor Solanki, of the Tribal Research and Training Institute (India), referred to the problem of the relation between the indigenous peoples of India, chiefly the Adivasi people, with a demographically significant population of millions of human beings, accounting for some 20 per cent of the total population, who in some States are completely marginalized, and the official educational system, all done in the Hindi language.

13. Mr. Love, of the Ministry of Maori Development Te Atiawa Tribe, representing the Maori people of New Zealand, explained how the Maori people, though making up only 10 per cent of the national population, accounted for 22 per cent of the country's school population, on account of its proportion of young people and its rate of demographic growth. The Maoris had already won the right to learn and practise their language and to control their own schools. He also said that the challenge was maintaining their traditions alive and preparing the new generation for full participation in global activities.

14. Workshop participants then gave many practical examples of the urgent need in many parts of the world to use higher education not in order to promote an elite but as the nerve centre of the indigenous educational system, starting from primary school and literacy teaching at the base, and rising through the requirements of secondary education at all levels of cultural and social development, making it the key to the development of values and democratic practices in their respective countries. In a world increasingly governed by the implacable economic laws of profit and the market, acquiring knowledge has become a requirement of survival.

15. Indigenous peoples have to overcome the effects of economic pressures in their higher education establishments, in order to attract indigenous youth, which was increasingly tempted to reject indigenous culture, and in order to ensure transmission of their culture through higher education, considering that historically education was the main instrument of the destruction and domination of indigenous civilizations.

16. Several participants criticized the influence of this contradictory historical role of education given in non-indigenous languages, which draws indigenous youths away from their culture and their people and attracts them to the market of the dominant society through the well-known process of the brain drain. In the words of a Kuna shaman: "If they go to school, they will be lost".

17. Mr. Willie Littlechild of Canada and some indigenous participants from Costa Rica commented on the legal framework that already exists in most countries that have ratified international conventions and whose legal systems contain laws and rules guaranteeing indigenous communities in theory the right to self-education. However, theory and practice are worlds apart and the sharp contradictions which still appear at all levels of the educational systems leave the indigenous peoples in particularly difficult dilemmas. How

can they reconcile the dominant paradigm, which is a factor of acculturation, alienation and discrimination, with the indigenous paradigm of transmission and production of their own specific knowledge?

18. The participants asked how indigenous wise men could be integrated, through alternative methodologies, to ensure that they would transmit both their traditional knowledge and their constant ability to produce new knowledge adapted to our time; many of them, mistrusting "school education" seen through the refracting prism of the dominant version of history, are reluctant to be once again exploited and discriminated against, at a time when their wisdom is more useful than ever, not only for indigenous communities, but for mankind in general.

19. How can political leaders, in the fragile democracies of many countries of Asia and Africa, where indigenous and endogenous identities constitute the majority, be persuaded to support educational systems that will put an end to historical oppression and secure the political, cultural, social and economic bases of a form of higher education respectful of the interests of different indigenous peoples, whether in the minority or in the majority? What type of curriculum should indigenous higher education offer? What should be done? Should one strengthen the dominant society even further, confirming its dominion over minds, especially those of young people, or would it not be better to promote the development of indigenous peoples, fostering their specific ability to produce new knowledge while respecting their spirituality and their privileged relations with Mother Earth?

II. Themes II and III - The role of higher education in in the training and development of skills in indigenous peoples - practical experiences and The role of research, higher education and training institutions in promoting the human rights of indigenous peoples

20. The presentations and discussions on these themes were animated. The choice of subjects was intended to encourage exchanges of views regarding existing teaching institutions and programmes and the range of different socio-economic situations on the basis of practical experiences. There was broad underlying agreement in substance with respect to the need for recognition of the human rights of indigenous peoples, on a day-to-day basis, in their community life and their contacts with non-indigenous societies.

21. Participants proposed changing the structure of the meeting by setting up four discussion groups on sub-themes as a means of helping all participants to express their views and to have a chance to discuss ideas and proposals in more detail, after which a combined presentation was given of the two themes, which were shown to be complementary.

22. An attempt was made in the ensuing discussion to arrive at a common analysis, taking into account the diversity of local situations and the political, economic, social and cultural obstacles faced by indigenous peoples on the five continents, of practical ways of promoting the development of higher education, aiming at sustainable development, the affirmation of

cultural identity and better recognition by the dominant society, for the benefit not only of indigenous peoples but of the whole international community.

23. From the discussions, a number of common ideas emerged, which were shared by all countries regardless of where they were. Participants were able to identify some essential criteria, on the basis of which they could examine existing situations and set out strategies in response to the major challenge, summarized in the following terms by Mr. Paulin Hountondji, Director of the African Centre for Advanced Studies of Porto Novo (Benin): "How is it possible against the general background of the post-colonial world, where the store of knowledge has so far been completely monopolized for the sole benefit of the West, to avoid being ideologically, scientifically and intellectually dependent on the accumulation of the knowledge of others? How can a way be found of reappropriating traditional indigenous knowledge by the production and transmission of new knowledge favouring the realization of the rights and communal progress of indigenous identities?"

24. It was agreed among participants that the answers to these questions should be sought pragmatically in a spirit of economic and political realism. Should the fact of creating or developing indigenous higher education also help to reshape the dominant system, whose historical claim to impose its own socio-economic and cultural models is undoubtedly undergoing a profound crisis, which is affecting indigenous and non-indigenous peoples alike and is opening up new challenges on the eve of the third millennium? How can research and higher education help to give indigenous civilizations back the dynamism of intellectual and aesthetic creativity, thus allowing them to reassume a driving role in the task of redefining the intellectual and cultural landscape of our time?

Indigenous higher education and the authorities

25. All the participants recognized that the emergence and development of indigenous higher education is a question of reconquering intellectual power. In this sense, as a result of a historic process which has so far been uninterruptedly discriminatory, the outcome would depend heavily on the ability to reshape the political framework.

26. Discussions focused on the negative legacy inherited by indigenous peoples as a result of historical events in recent centuries, which in most cases wreaked havoc on practically all aspects of their political, social and economic life. Following a policy which was a constant feature of the era of conquest and domination, the colonial powers used education systematically as an instrument for dissolving and destroying indigenous identities. Some participants drew attention to the fact that some differences in the approaches to intellectual and cultural "colonization" were still being felt and reflected the cultural identity of former colonial empires in the lives of indigenous peoples. These different colonial approaches, by introducing variations in the process of acculturation, have left clear traces in the cultural landscapes, reflecting notable differences between former French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and British colonies. Latin colonizers took a paternalistic attitude to access to education based on the use of religious evangelization and linguistic assimilation. In the territories under

Anglo-Saxon colonization, on the other hand, the general practice was non-integration, so that indigenous peoples were cast out to the boundaries of the empire and left without Western education, although at the same time free to practice their own languages and their own cultural customs.

27. Generally speaking, throughout the colonial system, from the basic teaching of reading and writing in the dominant language in primary and secondary schooling, a selective, discriminatory approach erected insuperable barriers, which prevented the access of indigenous youths to higher education. A few indigenous individuals were granted the supreme benefit of higher education "conceded" by the colonial power, and these lucky few usually became culturally forever "white", the victims of the contempt in which the heritage of indigenous wisdom and science was held by the colonial power, resulting in structural damage to the individual's image of himself. In that historical situation, there were a few heroic cases of personal resistance handed down by oral tradition, which were mentioned by several participants from Latin America, like the case of Lautaro, a hero of the Inca empire, who was able to rival the colonial power by appropriating the art of horsemanship.

28. Indigenous graduates, assimilated by the dominant culture, still have a tendency to become objective agents of discrimination against their own people, thus acting as a vehicle of the loss of "self-esteem". They do not return to their community of origin, to which they do not give back what was invested in their education. That allows the dominant powers to "wash their hands" of the problem since very often the individuals concerned have received grants for their studies. Hence the difficulty with teacher training, a major concern of the whole system of transmission of knowledge. The higher education developed on the basis of the dominant culture with a view to destroying the ability of indigenous peoples to produce their own knowledge, merely reinforces the stereotypes that reduce indigenous knowledge to an irrational and archaic caricature.

29. Nevertheless, quite clearly the cultural and behavioural models which the participants considered as exogenous standards of economic development and social organization have now reached their limits. One of these limits is the resistance capacity of indigenous peoples gained through their identity and their culture. This resistance is particularly well illustrated in the case of Bolivia, which was reported by Mrs. Filomena Miranda Casas of the Foro Indígena. Despite their historic wounds, indigenous Bolivians often managed to maintain alive their language and their collective memory. These are chiefly transmitted and enriched by the Elders, the "wise men", holders of scientific knowledge and humanistic, aesthetic and cultural values, who continue to inspire the life of the community. Thanks to close contact with the environment and nature, original knowledge and cognitive practices have also been preserved, which now bear witness to the existence of a powerful indigenous source of cultural and scientific revival.

30. For all these reasons, the participants felt that the International Decade, and especially the workshop, were coming at a time that marked the end of the absolute domination of western "cognitive imperialism". The coincidence with the arrival of a new millennium acquires a symbolic value, which is all the more strategic in that the date, suggesting renewal, coincides with eras of new beginnings in some indigenous calendars. The Maya

culture, for example, in its holy writing, the Popol Vuh, quoted several times by Mr. Manuel Salazar of the Mayan University of Guatemala, has foretold that our times should open up a new era, a prediction appearing in other indigenous writings as well. This new dynamic is confirmed by the significant measures taken by indigenous peoples to set up higher education institutions, thus demonstrating their ability to organize and to launch innovative projects.

31. The national, regional and sometimes local authorities do not take account of indigenous needs in their planning and in their educational systems. Even in countries whose multi-ethnic corposition has been legally and constitutionally recognized, education policies are permeated by administrative centralism, which will not consider the indigenous factor as a source of difference deserving proper attention and adequate means.

32. In most cases, speakers noted that indigenous communities did not hold political power and continued to live in a situation of political domination within countries where the indigenous problem is not given priority, even though quite the opposite might at times be expected on quantitive grounds, in view of the numeric weight of indigenous populations, especially if they actually constitute a majority, as occurs in several countries of Latin America.

33. The positive political tendencies in some countries like Nicaragua, Canada, South Africa or New Zealand, show that the conquest of indigenous higher education is related to political factors and means that negotiating strategies are needed in order to ensure that higher education institutions are compatible with the dominant systems. National political leaders at all levels need to be persuaded to conceive, promote and implement in practice a new educational and paradigmatic framework. The new approach should enable national systems to take advantage of the inestimable wealth of knowledge held by indigenous communities, which needs to be systematized through research, recognized in curricula and pragmatically used for the sustainable development of peoples. The present situation is a crossroads reflecting modern politics and the new challenges facing indigenous peoples. It is a question now of putting into effect the potential of indigenous knowledge. Higher education and its ability to transmit and recreate knowledge has proven to be the best vehicle of renewal, an instrument of institutional empowerment both for the reconquest of control of indigenous knowledge and for the achievement of recognition by the other, non indigenous form of culture.

34. The concept of "governability" provides the means of acquiring intellectual independence; it conveys the strengthening of the collective awareness of duties and rights, and relates to historic events in respect of territorial occupation and the affirmation of civilizations. Mr. Carlos Brenes Castillo, an indigenous sociologist from Costa Rica, representing the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), highlighted the challenge of producing a type of organization of knowledge as an expression of the entire community, insofar as the latter becomes a producer of knowledge and not only a consumer of foreign science. It is a question of regenerating indigenous communities, building up a new intelligence for tomorrow.

Inventory of existing achievements

35. Following the discussions and the presentation of many types of experiences, with the launch of new projects and higher education establishments for indigenous peoples on the five continents, the workshop could draw up a preliminary inventory.

36. The existence and positive functioning of indigenous higher education establishments are now an irreversible reality. These practical experiences can serve as references and may be used as a basis on which to establish local, national, regional and global diagnoses.

37. The need to systematize the inventory and to update it was expressed by the FAO representative and approved by the participants, who considered that it would constitute an indispensable tool for facilitating cooperation between indigenous peoples and professionals. It was also recognized that, beyond geographic frontiers, in view of the similarity of many factors and the presence of shared features, experiments already conducted in different parts of the world could be adapted to different situations.

38. The activities of a few institutions and higher education programmes, such as the Polar Academy of St. Petersburg, in the Russian Federation, represented by its dean, Mrs. Azourguet A. Chaoukenbaeva, were considered particularly significant. The Academy, which was founded in 1993, has as its objective the training of a new generation of indigenous intellectuals, who will be able to develop their national culture and to work in the new economic and cultural conditions. In order to achieve this objective, the Polar Academy's approach is based on the concept of continuing education. This is the first higher education establishment in the Russian Federation which is dedicated to training indigenous peoples in State and municipal administration, finance, national economic management, management, commerce, philosophy, ethnology, ethnopolitics and foreign languages (English and French). The academic cycle lasts between two and four years. Participants particularly appreciated the information given about the way contracts were signed, either by the Academy or by the students themselves, with indigenous communities, in order to ensure that graduates, once they have completed their university and vocational training, will be employed in their home regions and will thus return to their communities.

39. For the contribution of Nicaragua's URACCAN on the subject, see paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 of this report.

40. The Chilean experiment with the creation of the Institute of Mapuche Studies at Temuco has focused particularly on socialization and on the recognition of the cultural and economic rights of the Mapuche people. It endeavours to deal with the consequences of the fragmentation of this people, which resisted colonial domination up to 1881 but has been the victim of a systematic policy of encroachment on rural areas following its recent loss of autonomy.

41. A number of representatives of Canada spoke of their own experiences in designing and establishing higher education institutions run by indigenous peoples, in particular the Indigenous Government Institute in Vancouver and

the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. They also drew attention to the presence of indigenous programmes within national universities, such as the University of Manitoba. A number of participants in the seminar supported a proposal for the creation of an international university for indigenous peoples recognized by the United Nations.

42. The project for community education in human rights in Australia, presented by Mr. David Curtis of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and Ms. Nerida Blair of the University of Newcastle, Australia, was set up in response to some experiences with discrimination and human rights violations. It is concerned with providing access to legal knowledge and compiling information on racism, helping to find creative local solutions that can be applied in the everyday life of communities. The project's programmes tackle the problem on several levels: determination of the facts, determination of legal responsibilities and requirements, and definition of an appropriate legal apparatus to incorporate traditional aboriginal law and to establish complementary links between community law and national and international law, so as to encourage the communities to be creative in the application of legal investigation to specific situations.

43. Alongside these specific cases, many participants presented original initiatives noteworthy for their modulated response to the diverse situations faced by the indigenous peoples of the North and the South, whether in the minority or the majority, who are increasingly aware of how important it is for them to develop higher education.

44. The review of these practical experiences with indigenous education over the last 10 years led participants to diagnoses showing the relationship between the aspirations of indigenous peoples and the contradictions produced by higher education within their communities. Particularly noteworthy among these contradictions was a recurrent new trend towards individualism, breaking with indigenous traditions, which are organically structured around the community and not the individual.

45. Unprecedented contradictions are also arising in the responses of indigenous peoples to the economic imperatives with which their societies, like all present-day societies, are faced for their material survival. It is a real challenge for them to devise an appropriate form of development that is inspired by their vision, or better still their cosmic vision, and produces holistic knowledge. The participants were in agreement that in all the cultures of their respective peoples and in the knowledge produced by indigenous civilizations in general, mankind is inseparable from nature. Likewise, there is no clear division between the theoretical and the practical, the individual and the collective, the rational and the irrational. This characteristic that lies at the root of indigenous thinking has not been affected by colonial attempts to eradicate the special practices that enabled indigenous peoples to preserve their own knowledge. Ms. Evelyn Dunuan of the Philippines referred to the legislation of November 1997, which, after a long legal and political battle, had resulted in special measures for indigenous education. She explained that the indigenous peoples have gained the right to set up their own schools and develop appropriate curricula. This holistic vision is adaptable to indigenous systems of economic survival and management,

which are capable of enriching the environment, and also to their ability to create artefacts and systems of aesthetic and philosophical codes.

46. All the participants recognized that the pressures of intellectual domination, aggravated for economic reasons, far from disappearing have increased in recent decades and that the indigenous peoples, even more than other communities that are discriminated against, exploited and marginalized, must devise clear-minded and realistic responses to the law of the market place and of profit in the prevailing climate of national and international neo-liberalism.

47. Economic realism requires the indigenous peoples to strike a fine balance between the urgent socio-economic need for executive and managerial staff, trained technicians and experts and a systematic acquisition of modern technologies on the one hand, and the need to investigate and analyse the traditions that express their cultural identity on the other. This would mean finding approaches of their own to the acquisition of knowledge in all the human sciences, literature, philosophy, metaphysics and the arts.

Strategies for strengthening and establishing institutions for indigenous higher education

48. Three approaches were defined by consensus:

(a) To systematize the knowledge that is available and is commonly imparted within the indigenous communities. This indigenous knowledge has never ceased to be produced, preserved and transmitted. The role of higher education is to identify it, formalize it, make it accessible and relevant to the current living conditions of the communities, and produce new methodological tools.

(b) To make indigenous higher education into a collective instrument for the benefit of the communities, responding to the economic need to strengthen indigenous communities and to create and implement their own solutions.

(c) To promote and protect indigenous intellectual property, seeking compatibility between the traditionally collective form of production and the dominant system based on private ownership.

Cardinal role of research in all disciplines

49. Research has a basic and crucial responsibility. It forms the bridge between the expression of the knowledge handed down by custom and tradition and the indigenous peoples' intellectual and scientific response to the challenges of today. Knowledge that is attained through practice strengthened by research will express endogenous realities, preserving the integrity of the specific cultures. Some participants referred to the danger of intellectual self-imprisonment and the need for permanent critical reappropriation in indigenous thinking, as a prerequisite for any attempt at intellectual renewal. The creation of a new epistemological framework must be based

simultaneously on a deeper study of indigenous culture and on the will to produce knowledge that is equal to and compatible with that of the dominant system and worthy of its respect.

50. The participants stressed that interculturality should be developed by means of functional, complementary bilingualism, without which it is impossible to enter into a symmetrical dialogue between indigenous identity and the national culture. In some countries the stating of this basic need has already met with methodological responses involving the development of intercultural bilingual education, as yet regarded as a pilot project. The participant of Brazil, Mrs. María de Lourdes Elías, who belongs to the Terena people of Mato Grosso do Sul and spoke in her own language, Terena, proclaimed the imperative need to recognize the indigenous languages. She explained how the absence of State support in Brazil creates difficulties for education in indigenous languages and places young indigenous people at a disadvantage: they are not taught to read and write in their own languages, and are unable to follow the primary and secondary curricula on account of the barrier of the Portuguese language, which is imposed in spite of the federal laws that theoretically guarantee and recognize the indigenous languages.

51. For all the participants, the wise people and elders form the roots and the trunk of the tree of indigenous knowledge. Their role is crucial in all education from the primary level onward, in the cross-disciplinary dimension and in the definition of alternative teaching. Their function is not only to transmit traditional knowledge, although this is the base of the entire pyramid of community knowledge that has been handed down for centuries by tradition, often oral tradition, but also to participate in the development of new knowledge. "When an elder dies, it is like a library being burned down", to quote the well-known words of the philosopher of the Fulani people, Amadou Hampaté Ba, which express not just the African vision but that of the whole range of indigenous peoples represented in the seminar.

52. Elders are of crucial importance in defining new paradigms, provided that new ways are found of involving them at the highest level in the design of new methodological and epistemological approaches, which express the indigenous world vision and will lead the dominant system to respect the unique capability of that vision to form the bridge between a living tradition and an indigenous modernity that has never ceased to produce knowledge. The wise people of the indigenous communities can help to recover indigenous learning as a whole in order to strengthen the self-esteem of the indigenous peoples within the consistency of their specific cognitive practices.

53. Economic realism must not take precedence over training in humanism and the acquisition of ethical and spiritual values. Speaker after speaker placed the issue of indigenous spirituality at the centre of the entire educational process, as the general framework of thought and of social and intellectual organization. Becoming educated does not just mean acquiring technical knowledge and being capable of carrying out occupational activities so as to obtain a skilled job and secure socio-economic advancement. This objective, necessary as it is, has already proved within the dominant educational system to be a destabilizing factor, because it strengthens materialism and a quantitative view of the world to the detriment of human values.

54. The predominance of individualistic objectives makes the obtaining of a diploma into an instrument of social competition, which may weaken the cohesiveness of the group. This excessive leaning towards materialism is largely responsible for the deep crisis afflicting the universities and higher education institutions of the dominant system, which, as many speakers stressed, are turning out "heads that are full with the wrong ideas" and professionals who only possess technical skills and fragmentary, specialized knowledge.

55. The participants affirmed that indigenous higher education must be structured around the transmission of integrated systems of holistic knowledge and must draw on the wellsprings of indigenous spirituality, which can enrich ethical and humanist values. Higher education should not only be realistic and pragmatic but should also reflect the spiritual richness of the indigenous cosmogonies and philosophies, which are inexhaustible sources of wisdom and of man's harmonious equilibrium on his land and among his people. According to the Popol Vuh, which has already been quoted earlier, "Every human being is my other self, aware of being immersed in the cosmos"; and "The raison d'être of your knowledge is the requirement that you pass it on to your community. In that way you will have room left in your brain to acquire other knowledge and become more closely linked to Mother Earth".

56. Indigenous spirituality and its integration into education were found to be a prerequisite for the social cohesion of the indigenous peoples and the strengthening of their identity and community integrity for the achievement of their human rights.

III. Theme IV. International cooperation in research and higher education establishments - creating networks and exchanges and developing joint programmes

57. This theme focused attention on the international dimension of building research and higher education establishments among the world's indigenous peoples. Thanks to the diverse geographical composition of the participants, who represented the five continents, it was possible to establish the foundations of international cooperation among existing initiatives in higher education, on the basis of practical experience, and in accordance with the diversity of the specific needs of the communities not only at local, regional and national level but also in their inter-regional and international dimension.

58. The basis for cooperation among higher education and research establishments is the principle of solidarity and interchange among social groups which, because of their similar experience of historical oppression and present-day discrimination, need to work closely together to strengthen their common capability for intellectual revival, taking advantage of all individual advances. Thus, structurally complementary cooperation among the existing initiatives needs to be developed and standardized as an organic component of the entire organization and planning process in respect of teaching and the curriculum.

59. Presentations given by representatives of United Nations specialized agencies, such as the World Bank, FAO, UNESCO, UNDP and ILO, were particularly

appreciated because they described the institutional and financial mechanisms available to the indigenous communities for the support of their initiatives.

60. Finally, the address by Mr. Pito Stewart Morales, teacher of the Bribri language at the Radio Teaching Institute of Costa Rica, aroused particular interest because of the use of radio as an alternative teaching tool. This method is being used in Costa Rica in experimental projects because it can reach the communities directly in their everyday lives, using their own language. Radio could be systematically used as a vector of communication and expression for all generations on the basis of applied decentralized methodologies.

61. Mr. Estabancio Castro, former holder of an indigenous fellowship of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, was invited to sum up the session from the young people's viewpoint. After giving an analytical summary of the discussions, he emphasized the responsibility of communities, whose principal aim must be to develop their own systems of education based on a critical view of their own needs.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

62. The seminar adopted the following conclusions and recommendations:

PREAMBLE

The indigenous peoples have rich and diverse languages, heritages, cultures and knowledge, acquired through their relationships between themselves and their environments, which find expression in their various traditions, beliefs, customs and ceremonies.

The indigenous peoples have incorporated in their languages and cultures their own processes, protocols and practices for gaining access to their knowledge and transmitting and sharing it.

Indigenous knowledge contributes to global wisdom.

Higher education establishments should reject all forms of research that treat the indigenous peoples as objects and should strengthen skills, cultures, languages and economies in the communities.

The experts and delegates attending the seminar on research and higher education establishments and the indigenous peoples affirm their wish, intention and active endeavours to gain recognition and promote respect for indigenous knowledge, languages and cultures by means of formal and informal educational processes.

CONCLUSIONS

Access by indigenous peoples to higher education

1. The indigenous peoples have made progress within the United Nations system and in some States towards the recognition of their rights. In some countries the rights of the indigenous peoples, their autonomous institutions,

land and resources are better protected and these rights have been recognized constitutionally and by legislation. In the field of higher education, improvements have been made for the indigenous peoples through the provision of scholarships, hostels, culturally appropriate courses and other means. Education in general has been used as a means to enable the indigenous peoples to escape from the state of poverty in which many of them live. However, it was noted that the recognition of the political, economic, social and cultural rights of the indigenous peoples is a prerequisite for improvements in higher education.

3. In many parts of the world indigenous peoples are subjected to social, political and economic discrimination and inequalities that contribute to the destruction of their economies and cultures. Despite such experiences, the indigenous peoples have given rise to a wide variety of cultures, languages, knowledge and heritages and have become motivated to develop their potential to the full. Some of these inequalities have placed the indigenous peoples at a disadvantage. They include the lack of fellowships and other financial support, low self-esteem, a discouraging and alien cultural environment for indigenous peoples in the universities, the long distances between indigenous communities and higher education centres, the difficulties associated with teaching in a language other than that of the indigenous student, inadequate teaching at primary and secondary levels, and low success rates of indigenous peoples in secondary education. Some participants described the universities as large factories producing unemployed graduates.

Higher education establishments and their contribution to the development of indigenous peoples

3. The higher education establishments have not responded to the needs of indigenous peoples. Nor do they provide education on indigenous rights and human rights. Educational philosophies, curricula and processes do not reflect the views on education held by indigenous peoples. Indigenous perceptions of education include ideas of spirituality, respect for the elders and traditional knowledge, science and physical well-being.

4. The majority of universities and post-secondary educational establishments do not offer courses encouraging indigenous peoples to improve their social and economic conditions. Higher education has contributed to alienating indigenous persons from their own peoples, producing a "brain drain" from their communities. Present-day higher education is contributing to the breakdown of the community vision.

5. In institutions with a western approach, research on indigenous peoples is frequently conducted in an unethical manner, violating the indigenous right to exercise control over their heritage and to hold the copyright on their intellect and culture, in such a way that groups or individuals outside the indigenous community reap the benefit.

6. The indigenous peoples need a balance between indigenous knowledge and the knowledge and skills offered by non-indigenous educational establishments, so that they can take their place in the global economy and in a changing world.

7. Higher education establishments become enriched and balanced when they incorporate the indigenous heritage, knowledge and perspective into their curricula. This helps the higher education establishments to fulfil their educational mandate in a multicultural society. Such skills bring benefits for the indigenous communities, without the latter losing their cultural identity, and contribute to the overall development of societies.

Culturally appropriate indigenous models for higher education

8. Indigenous peoples have the right to oversee and develop their own higher education and research establishments and for these establishments to be recognized and financially supported by the State. The existing conventions on human rights and ILO Convention No. 169 recognize that Governments have the obligation to guarantee that these rights are realized.

9. The culturally appropriate models of indigenous education and training are characterized by community-based participatory approaches. The community and elders are vital for the conceptualization, development, implementation and review of educational programmes.

10. Pre-school, primary and secondary establishments run by indigenous peoples, together with the State and non-governmental establishments catering for this level of education, are vital for the development of successful alternatives for the higher education of indigenous peoples.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the indigenous peoples

1. The indigenous peoples should identify and clarify their own research protocols and practices so that investigators can conduct inquiries and research in an appropriate and respectful manner.

2. The indigenous peoples should encourage the exchange of students, teachers and experience between their own higher education and research establishments.

3. Under the terms of indigenous laws and customs, these peoples should promote models of education by setting up their own institutions run by themselves and establishing their own programmes and courses at all levels within the conventional institutions.

4. The indigenous peoples should continue the active search for a decolonized process and outcome within all teaching establishments.

5. The indigenous peoples should bear in mind that their higher education projects must be of high quality, providing training for indigenous persons and peoples who are in possession of their culture and live in a constantly changing and developing world.

6. The indigenous peoples, in accordance with the principles and values of their cultures, should look upon the construction of their higher education as part of the effort to improve their own development and contribute to mankind.

To Governments

7. Governments should comply with the human rights conventions, ILO Convention No. 169 and national laws on the rights of indigenous peoples.

8. States should guarantee that young indigenous persons have the opportunity to study at all levels and in all disciplines and to work as qualified professionals in their communities.

9. States should recognize and establish mechanisms to ensure the enjoyment of all the human rights of indigenous peoples, in particular the rights related to the education, languages and cultures of indigenous peoples.

10. States should support the establishment of educational institutions run by indigenous peoples and should finance them adequately.

11. States should fully recognize and respect the existence of indigenous peoples.

12. States should support the preparation of curricula that are relevant to the realities of indigenous peoples and should allocate the technical and financial resources for the proper implementation of those curricula.

To the United Nations

13. The Organization should transmit the conclusions and recommendations of the seminar to the Special Rapporteur responsible for the right to education, with the request to ensure that her report fully reflects the indigenous experiences and the views of indigenous experts.

14. Within the present International Decade, the United Nations should consider sponsoring and supporting the establishment of an international indigenous university, which could take the form of a consortium of existing indigenous institutes of higher education and serve as a parent institution for new centres of indigenous higher education in the world.

15. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should consider holding annual workshops and seminars on matters related to the indigenous peoples and higher education. For example, it might arrange an annual meeting of indigenous peoples to review the progress made in implementing these recommendations. The participants in the seminar accepted the offer made by the Rector of the State Polar Academy in St. Petersburg to host a seminar on indigenous higher education establishments and the offer made by the Director of the African Centre for Advanced Studies to host an international seminar on indigenous knowledge in Porto Novo, Benin. The participants accepted the invitation from the Rector of URACCAN to take part in the regional meeting on higher education in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, in October 1999.

16. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should, in collaboration with the indigenous peoples, compile a list of experts and institutions for indigenous higher education and research, which would be internationally available. This would facilitate cooperation.

17. UNESCO should hold a meeting of indigenous peoples in order to draw up a code of ethics for research.

18. UNESCO is urged to strengthen its institutional structures and programmes for promoting the cultures and languages of indigenous peoples. In conjunction with other organizations of the United Nations system, UNESCO should organize a world conference on the education, science and cultures of indigenous peoples.

19. The United Nations should establish a prize to be awarded annually in recognition of the efforts of indigenous peoples to develop their own educational institutions. It should set up a fund for the promotion and implementation of research - through inter-agency relations - to support a state-of-the-art study on indigenous education and indigenous knowledge.

To research and higher education establishments

20. Higher education establishments should eliminate discriminatory practices and policies from their admission procedures and deal with the practices that exclude indigenous cultures in the educational context.

21. Higher education establishments should guarantee that their departments or faculties of law include courses on indigenous rights and human rights.

22. Research and higher education establishments should enter into dialogue and negotiations with the indigenous peoples in order to draw up a code of ethics for research involving them. Research within indigenous communities should not take place without the full and informed consent of the indigenous peoples themselves.

23. Higher education establishments should ensure that their curricula, timetables and research represent a balance of the plurality of knowledge in all disciplines and for the benefit of indigenous peoples. Higher education establishments should include mechanisms for the full participation of indigenous peoples in their decision-making structures.

24. Higher education establishments which have indigenous students are urged to include courses related to indigenous knowledge and culture in their basic curricula and training.

25. When teachers and other professionals work in indigenous territories, indigenous peoples should be consulted on their training, selection and recruitment.

26. Higher education establishments are urged to facilitate access to their curricula for indigenous teachers and research workers.

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